

422.3 - ADMISSION OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

Children and youth who meet the Federal definition of “homeless” will have equal opportunity to meet state and district academic achievement standards; and will be free from discrimination, segregation and harassment. Children and youth in transition, including unaccompanied youth, will be provided equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education as provided to other students within the School District of Auburndale.

DEFINITION OF HOMLESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The term 'homeless children and youths' means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence due to economic hardship. It includes children and youths who:

- are temporarily sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- are living in motels, hotels, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- are living in emergency shelters;
- are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- have a nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- are unaccompanied, which includes runaway children, been thrown out of their homes, and/or abandoned by parents or guardians; and/or
- migratory children who are living in a situation described above.

Unaccompanied youth includes youth in homeless situations who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. This may include young people who have run away from home, been thrown out of their homes and/or been abandoned by parents or guardians. In all cases, the school district will obtain and keep on file a current emergency contact for each unaccompanied youth.

SCHOOL SELECTION

Students who are homeless have the right to continue their education in their school of origin. The school of origin means the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled. Placement shall be made with the child's best interest in mind and may continue in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness, such as when a family becomes homeless between or during academic years.

In determining the best interests of the child or youth to the extent feasible the child or youth will be kept in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the

wishes of the child's or youth's parent or guardian, for the duration of homelessness. Feasibility shall be a child-centered determination, based on the needs and interests of the particular student and the parent or youth's wishes.

Potential feasibility considerations include:

- safety of the student;
- continuity of instruction;
- likely area of family or youth's future housing;
- time remaining in the academic year;
- anticipated length of stay in temporary living situation;
- school placement of siblings; and
- whether the student has special needs that would render the commute harmful.

Services that are required to be provided, including transportation to and from the school of origin and services under federal and other programs, shall not be considered in determining feasibility.

In the case of unaccompanied youth, the District's homeless liaison will assist in placement or enrollment decisions considering the requests of such unaccompanied youth.

The choice regarding placement shall be made regardless of whether the child or youth lives with the homeless parents or guardian or has been temporarily placed elsewhere. The school selected shall immediately enroll the child/youth, even if the child or youth lacks records normally required for enrollment. Records will immediately be requested from the previous school. The terms 'enroll' and 'enrollment' are defined to mean attending school and participating fully in school activities.

COMPARABLE SERVICES

Each homeless child or youth shall be provided services comparable to services offered to other students such as:

- preschool programs;
- transportation services;
- educational services for which the child or youth meets eligibility criteria such as ESL or Special Education programs;
- Vocational and Technical Education programs;

- programs for "At Risk" students;
- programs for Gifted and Talented students;
- school nutrition programs;
- Title I services; and
- before and after-school programs.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS

The District recognizes that "homeless" children and youth in transition suffer from disabilities at a disproportionate rate, yet frequently are not evaluated or provided appropriate special education and related services. To address this problem, evaluations of children and youth in transition suspected of having a disability shall be coordinated with students' prior and subsequent schools as necessary to ensure timely completion of a full evaluation. When necessary, the district shall expeditiously designate a surrogate parent for unaccompanied youth suspected of having a disability. If a student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the enrolling school shall review and implement the plan immediately (dependent on district resources). Any necessary IEP meetings or re-evaluations shall then be conducted expeditiously. If complete records are not available, IEP teams must use sound educational judgment in choosing the best course of action, balancing procedural requirements and the provision of services. In all cases, the goal is to avoid any interruption of educational services.

TRANSPORTATION

At the request of the parent, unaccompanied youth or LEA liaison, transportation will be provided for children and youths in transition to the school of origin, for the duration of homelessness. In the case where the school of origin and current residence are different school districts, the two school districts will agree on a method for transportation and share costs.

Once permanent housing is found, the student may stay in the school that they are attending, the school of origin, or attend the school where they have found housing until the end of the academic year. Once the student becomes permanently housed, it is at the district's discretion to assist the family with transportation needs.

The *McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act* requires districts to provide transportation for preschool students comparable to transportation for any preschool student in the district.

FREE MEALS

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, the U.S. Department of

Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day a child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school must submit the student's name to the district nutrition office for immediate processing.

TITLE I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness put students at sufficient risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The district shall provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. Reserved funds will be used to provide education-related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular attendance.

Title I funds may not be used to provide transportation for homeless students to their school of origin. However once students who were homeless become permanently housed, districts may use Title I funds to pay for their transportation for the remainder of the school year.

The district's Title I plan will be coordinated with McKinney-Vento services, through collaboration between the Title I Coordinator and the LEA liaison. Children and youth in transition shall be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by federal law and U.S. Department of Education regulations and guidance.

LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY (LEA) LIAISON

School Counselors shall serve as the LEA liaison for homeless children and youths within their respective buildings. As the LEA liaison for their building, the School Counselor shall ensure that:

- homeless children and youths are voluntarily identified by school personnel and through coordination with other entities and agencies;
- homeless children and youth enroll in and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in district programs;
- homeless families, children and youths receive educational services for which they are eligible and referrals made for other appropriate services;
- the parents or guardians of a homeless child/youth are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to them and provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their child/youth;
- public notice of the educational rights of homeless children/youth is

disseminated in such public places as schools, meal sites, shelters and other locations frequented by low income families;

- district policies and procedures are followed and enrollment disputes are mediated
- the parents or guardians of a homeless child/youth or an unaccompanied youth are informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin;
- children and youths who do not have immunizations or medical records get assistance in obtaining the necessary immunizations or medical records;
- students are not segregated on the basis of their status as homeless; and
- programs for homeless students are coordinated with other federal and local programs.

The liaison will keep data on the number of children and youth in transition in the district, where they are living, their academic achievement (Including performance on state and district-wide assessments); and the reasons for any enrollment delays or interruptions in their education.

DISPUTES

If a dispute arises over the selection or enrollment in a school the child or youth shall be immediately admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute. The student shall have the rights of a student in transition to all appropriate educational services, transportation, free meals, and Title I services while the dispute is pending. The LEA liaison shall carry out the dispute process as expeditiously as possible.

The decision of the LEA liaison may be appealed to the District Administrator. The District Administrator will provide the parent or guardian of the child or youth, or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of the appealed decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parent, guardian, or youth to appeal the decision to the Office of Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths in the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

*Legal References: Section 118.13 Wisconsin Statutes
P11 Wisconsin Administrative Code
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*

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